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SUBJECT: Italy Ups WHO Contribution for 2008; Polio Eradication Efforts Included

REF: A) Rome 2392 B) SECSTATE 145220

¶1. Summary: Italy will contribute 16 million Euros to the World Health Organization in 2008, a significant increase over previous years. The 2008 contribution will also include, for the first time in six years, an earmark for polio eradication efforts. Health Ministry officials have made clear Italy's concern over polio at international fora and have lobbied MFA officials for increased contributions. End Summary.

¶2. Mauro Massoni, head of the MFA's multilateral development cooperation office, told Econoff in response to ref b that the MFA received official confirmation of the 16 million Euro WHO donation on November 20. Italy's 2008 contribution is a significant increase over the 2007 donation of 9 million and the 4 million allocated in ¶2006.

¶3. Italy's "tesoretto" (extra government revenue resulting from Italy's stronger than expected GDP growth in 2007) is funding the expanded assistance budget for 2008. For the first time in six years, Massoni said, a portion of the WHO money will be earmarked for Qio eradication. Development officials, according to Massoni, had thought that Italy's 2002 multi-year contribution to polio eradication would be the last pledge they would ever need to make for combating polio. However, they now realize that polio is still a serious problem and therefore are resuming funding.

¶4. Italy's contributions to various other WHO projects, including the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) and the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Malaria and TB, will also be allocated from the 16 million contribution. Now that the total WHO contribution has been determined, Massoni said, the MFA can begin negotiating with WHO staff the exact amount of Italy's contributions to the various funds.

¶5. ESTCouns also spoke to Health Ministry Diplomatic Advisor Gianni Ghisi to encourage the GOI to resume funding polio eradication efforts, per ref b. Ghisi said that the MFA decides on GOI contributions to multilateral efforts such as the GPEI, but he weighed in with Massoni to express the Health Ministry's support for polio eradication efforts. Health Ministry Communication and Prevention Department Head Dr. Donato Greco has been an active participant in international conferences on polio, and has made clear Italy's strong concern about continuing endemic transmission of polio in a handful of countries, and the threat of its importation to countries which are now polio-free.

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